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HISTORY
OF THE
PIONEER SETTLEMENT
OF
PHELPS AND GORHAM'S PURCHASE,
AND
MORRIS' RESERVE;
EMBRACING THE COUNTIES OF
MONROE, ONTARIO, LIVINGSTON, YATES, STEUBEN,
MOST OF WAYNE AND ALLEGANY, AND PARTS
OF ORLEANS, GENESEE AND WYOMING.
TO WHICH IS ADDED, A SUPPLEMENT, OR EXTENSION OF THE PIONEER HISTORY OF
MONROE COUNTY.

THE WHOLE PRECEDED BY
SOME ACCOUNT OF FRENCH AND ENGLISH DOMINION—BORDER WARS OF THE REVOLUTION—INDIAN COUNCILS AND LAND CESSIONS—THE PROGRESS OF SETTLEMENT WESTWARD FROM THE VALLEY OF THE MOHAWK—EARLY DIFFICULTIES WITH THE INDIANS—OUR IMMEDIATE PREDECESSORS THE SENECAS—WITH “A GLANCE AT THE IROQUOIS.”

BY O. TURNER,
[AUTHOR OF THE “HISTORY OF THE HOLLAND PURCHASE.”]

ROCHESTER:
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In 1805, I was erecting my frame house, and wanted glass and nails. I went with oxen and sled to Utica, carrying 50 bushels of wheat. I sold it for \$1.68 per bushel, to Watts Sherman, a merchant of Utica, and paid 18d per pound for wrought nails ; \$7 50 for two boxes of glass.*

It was pretty easy for young men to secure farms, in the earliest years of settlement. I knew many who received a dollar a day for their labor, and bought lands for twenty five cents per acre.

A Baptist Church was organized in Manchester in 1804 ; the first Trustees were :—Ebenezer Pratt, Joseph Wells and Jeremiah Dewey. This was the first legal organization, a society had been formed previous to 1800. Judge Phelps gave the society a site for a meeting house, and in 1806 Deacon John McLouth erected a log building. In 1812 or 13, the stone meeting house was erected. Rev. Anson Shay organized the church, and remained its pastor for 25 years ; he emigrated to Michigan, where he died in 1845. The Methodists had a society organization as early as 1800, holding their primitive meetings in school and private houses.

“St. John’s Church, Farmington,” (Episcopal, at Sulphur Springs,) was organized by the Rev. Devenport Phelps, in 1807. The officers were :—John Shekels, Samuel Shekels, wardens ; Darius Seager, William Warner, George Wilson, Archibald A. Beal, Davis Williams, Thomas Edmonston, Alexander Howard, William Powell.†

GOLD BIBLE — MORMONISM.

As we are now at the home of the Smith family—in sight of “Mormon Hill”—a brief pioneer history will be looked for, of the strange, and singularly successful religious sect—the Mormons ; and *brief* it must be, merely starting it in its career, and leaving to their especial historian to trace them to Kirtland, Nauvoo, Beaver Island, and Utah, or the Salt Lake.

Joseph Smith, the father of the prophet Joseph Smith, Jr., was from the Merrimack river, N. H. He first settled in or near Palmyra village, but as

* Mr. Redfield has preserved his store bill. It is made out and signed by Henry B. Gibson, the well known Canandaigua Banker, who was the book keeper in Sherman’s store.

† A brother of the early Hotel keeper at Geneva. The two brothers had erected a public house at the Springs, and William was the landlord.

note

early as 1819 was the occupant of some new land on "Stafford street" in the town of Manchester, near the line of Palmyra.* "Mormon Hill" is near the plank road about half way between the villages of Palmyra and Manchester. The elder Smith had been a Universalist, and subsequently a Methodist; was a good deal of a smatterer in Scriptural knowledge: but the seed of revelation was sown on weak ground; he was a great babbler, credulous, not especially industrious, a money digger, prone to the marvellous; and withal, a little given to difficulties with neighbors, and petty law-suits. Not a very propitious account of the father of a Prophet,—the founder of a state; but there was a "woman in the case." However present, in matters of good or evil!—In the garden of Eden, in the siege of Troy, on the field of Orleans,† in the dawning of the Reformation, in the Palace of St. Petersburgh, and Kremlin of Moscow, in England's history, and Spain's proudest era; and here upon this continent, in the persons of Ann Lee, Jemima Wilkinson, and as we are about to add, Mrs. Joseph Smith! A mother's influences; in the world's history, in the history of men, how distinct is the impress!—In heroes, in statesmen, in poets, in all of good or bad aspirations, or distinctions, that single men out from the mass, and give them notoriety; how often, almost invariably, are we led back to the influences of a mother, to find the germ that has sprouted in the offspring.

The reader will excuse this interruption of narrative, and be told that Mrs. Smith was a woman of strong uncultivated intellect; artful and cunning; imbued with an illy regulated religious enthusiasm. The incipient hints, the first givings out that a Prophet was to spring from her humble household, came from her; and when matters were maturing for denouement, she gave out that such and such ones—always fixing upon those who had both money and credulity—were to be instruments in some great work of new revelation. The old man was rather her faithful co-worker, or executive exponent. Their son, Alvah, was originally intended, or designated, by fireside consultations, and solemn and mysterious out door hints, as the forth coming Prophet. The mother and the father said he was the chosen one; but Alvah, however spiritual he may have been, had a carnal appetite; eat too many green turnips, sickened and died. Thus the world lost a Prophet, and Mormonism a leader; the designs impiously and wickedly attributed to Providence, defeated; and all in consequence of a surfeit of raw turnips. Who will talk of the cackling geese of Rome, or any other small and innocent causes of mighty events, after this? The mantle of the Prophet which Mrs. and Mr. Joseph Smith and one Oliver Cowdery, had wove of themselves—every thread of it—fell upon their next eldest son, Joseph Smith, Jr.

And a most unpromising recipient of such a trust, was this same Joseph Smith, Jr., afterwards, "Jo. Smith." He was lounging, idle; (not to say vicious,) and possessed of less than ordinary intellect. The author's own recollections of him are distinct ones. He used to come into the village of Palmyra with little jags of wood, from his backwoods home; sometimes patronizing a village grocery too freely; sometimes find an odd job to do about

* Here the author remembers to have first seen the family, in the winter of '19, '20, in a rude log house, with but a small spot underbrushed around it.

† France.

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the store of Seymour Scovell; and once a week he would stroll into the office of the old Palmyra Register, for his father's paper. How impious, in us young "dare *Devils*"* to once and a while blacken the face of the then meddling inquisitive lounger—but afterwards Prophet, with the old fashioned balls, when he used to put himself in the way of the working of the old fashioned Ramage press! The editor of the Cultivator, at Albany—esteemed as he may justly consider himself, for his subsequent enterprize and usefulness, may think of it, with contrition and repentance; that he once helped, thus to disfigure the face of a Prophet, and remotely, the founder of a State.

But Joseph had a little ambition; and some very laudable aspirations; the mother's intellect occasionally shone out in him feebly, especially when he used to help us solve some portentous questions of moral or political ethics, in our juvenile debating club, which we moved down to the old red school house on Durfee street, to get rid of the annoyance of critics that used to drop in upon us in the village; and subsequently, after catching a spark of Methodism in the camp meeting, away down in the woods, on the Vienna road, he was a very passable exhorter in evening meetings.

Legends of hidden treasure, had long designated Mormon Hill as the depository. Old Joseph had dug there, and young Joseph had not only heard his father and mother relate the marvelous tales of buried wealth, but had accompanied his father in the midnight delvings, and incantations of the spirits that guarded it.

If a buried revelation was to be exhumed, how natural was it that the Smith family, with their credulity, and their assumed presentiment that a Prophet was to come from their household, should be connected with it; and that Mormon Hill was the place where it would be found.

It is believed by those who were best acquainted with the Smith family, and most conversant with all the Gold Bible movements, that there is no foundation for the statement that their original manuscript was written by a Mr. Spaulding, of Ohio. A supplement to the Gold Bible, "The Book of Commandments" in all probability, was written by Rigdon, and he may have been aided by Spaulding's manuscripts; but the book itself is without doubt, a production of the Smith family, aided by Oliver Cowdery, who was a school teacher on Stafford street, an intimate of the Smith family, and identified with the whole matter. The production as all will conclude, who have read it, or even given it a cursory review, is not that of an educated man or woman. The bungling attempt to counterfeit the style of the Scriptures; the intermixture of modern phraseology; the ignorance of chronology and geography; its utter crudeness and baldness, as a whole, stamp its character, and clearly exhibits its vulgar origin. It is a strange medley of scriptures, romance, and bad composition.

The primitive designs of Mrs. Smith, her husband, Jo and Cowdery, was money-making; blended with which perhaps, was a desire for notoriety, to be obtained by a cheat and a fraud. The idea of being the founders of a new sect, was an after thought, in which they were aided by others.

* To soften the use of such an expression, the reader should be reminded that apprentices in printing offices have since the days of Faust and Gottenberg, been thus called, and sometimes it was not inappropriate.

The projectors of the humbug, being destitute of means for carrying out their plans, a victim was selected to obviate that difficulty. Martin Harris, was a farmer of Palmyra, the owner of a good farm, and an honest worthy citizen; but especially given to religious enthusiasm, new creeds, the more extravagant the better; a monomaniac, in fact. Joseph Smith upon whom the mantle of prophecy had fallen after the sad fate of Alva, began to make demonstrations. He informed Harris of the great discovery, and that it had been revealed to him, that he (Harris,) was a chosen instrument to aid in the great work of surprising the world with a new revelation. They had hit upon the right man. He mortgaged his fine farm to pay for printing the book, assumed a grave, mysterious, and unearthly deportment, and made here and there among his acquaintances solemn annunciations of the great event that was transpiring. His version of the discovery, as communicated to him by the Prophet Joseph himself, is well remembered by several respectable citizens of Palmyra, to whom he made early disclosures. It was in substance, as follows:

The Prophet Joseph, was directed by an angel where to find, by excavation, at the place afterwards called Mormon Hill, the gold plates; and was compelled by the angel, much against his will, to be the interpreter of the sacred record they contained, and publish it to the world. That the plates contained a record of the ancient inhabitants of this country, "engraved by Mormon, the son of Nephi." That on the top of the box containing the plates, "a pair of large spectacles were found, the stones or glass set in which were opaque to all but the Prophet," that "these belonged to Mormon, the engraver of the plates, and without them, the plates could not be read." Harris assumed, that himself and Cowdery were the chosen amanuenses, and that the Prophet Joseph, curtained from the world and them, with his spectacles, read from the gold plates what they committed to paper. Harris exhibited to an informant of the author, the manuscript title page. On it were drawn, rudely and bunglingly, concentric circles, between above and below which were characters, with little resemblance to letters; apparently a miserable imitation of hieroglyphics, the writer may have somewhere seen. To guard against profane curiosity, the Prophet had given out that no one but himself, not even his chosen co-operators, must be permitted to see them, on pain of instant death. Harris had never seen the plates, but the glowing account of their massive richness excited other than spiritual hopes, and he upon one occasion, got a village silver-smith to help him estimate their value; taking as a basis, the Prophet's account of their dimensions. It was a blending of the spiritual and utilitarian, that threw a shadow of doubt upon Martin's sincerity. This, and some anticipations he indulged in, as to the profits that would arise from the sale of the Gold Bible, made it then, as it is now, a mooted question, whether he was altogether a dupe.

The wife of Harris was a rank infidel and heretic, touching the whole thing, and decidedly opposed to her husband's participation in it. With sacriligious hands, she seized over an hundred of the manuscript pages of the new revelation, and burned or secreted them. It was agreed by the Smith family, Cowdery and Harris, not to transcribe these again, but to let so much of the new revelation drop out, as the "evil spirit would get up a story that the second translation did not agree with the first." A very ingenious method, surely, of guarding against the possibility that Mrs. Harris had preserved the

manuscript with which they might be confronted, should they attempt an imitation of their own miserable patchwork.

The Prophet did not get his lesson well upon the start, or the household of impostors were in the fault. After he had told his story, in his absence, the rest of the family made a new version of it to one of their neighbors. They shewed him such a pebble as may any day be picked up on the shore of Lake Ontario—the common horn blend—carefully wrapped in cotton, and kept in a mysterious box. They said it was by looking at this stone, in a hat, the light excluded, that Joseph discovered the plates. This it will be observed, differs materially from Joseph's story of the angel. It was the same stone the Smiths' had used in money digging, and in some pretended discoveries of stolen property.

Long before the Gold Bible demonstration, the Smith family had with some sinister object in view, whispered another fraud in the ears of the credulous. They pretended that in digging for money, at Mormon Hill, they came across "a chest, three by two feet in size, covered with a dark colored stone. In the centre of the stone was a white spot about the size of a sixpence. Enlarging, the spot increased to the size of a twenty four pound shot and then exploded with a terrible noise. The chest vanished and all was utter darkness."

It may be safely presumed that in no other instance have Prophets and the chosen and designated of angels, been quite as calculating and worldly as were those of Stafford street, Mormon Hill, and Palmyra. The only business contract — veritable instrument in writing, that was ever executed by spiritual agents, has been preserved, and should be among the archives of the new state of Utah. It is signed by the Prophet Joseph himself, and witnessed by Oliver Cowdery, and secures to Martin Harris, one half of the proceeds of the sale of the Gold Bible until he was fully reimbursed in the sum of \$2,500, the cost of printing.

The after thought that has been alluded to ; the enlarging of original intentions ; was at the suggestion of Sidney Rigdon, of Ohio, who made his appearance, and blended himself with the poorly devised scheme of imposture about the time the book was issued from the press. He unworthily bore the title of a Baptist elder, but had by some previous freak, if the author is rightly informed, forfeited his standing with that respectable religious denomination. Designing, ambitious, and dishonest, under the semblance of sanctity and assumed spirituality, he was just the man for the uses of the Smith household and their half dupe and half designing abettors ; and they were just the fit instruments he desired. He became at once the Hamlet, or more appropriately perhaps, the Mawworm of the play. Like the veiled Prophet Mokanna, he may be supposed thus to have soliloquised : —

"Ye too, believers of incredible creeds,
Whose faith enshrines the monsters which it breeds ;
Who bolder, even than Nimrod, think to rise
By nonsense heaped on nonsense to the skies ;
Ye shall have miracles, aye, sound ones too,
Seen, heard, attested, every thing but true.
Your preaching zealots, too inspired to seek
One grace of meaning for the things they speak ;
Your martyrs ready to shed out their blood

For truths too heavenly to be understood ;"

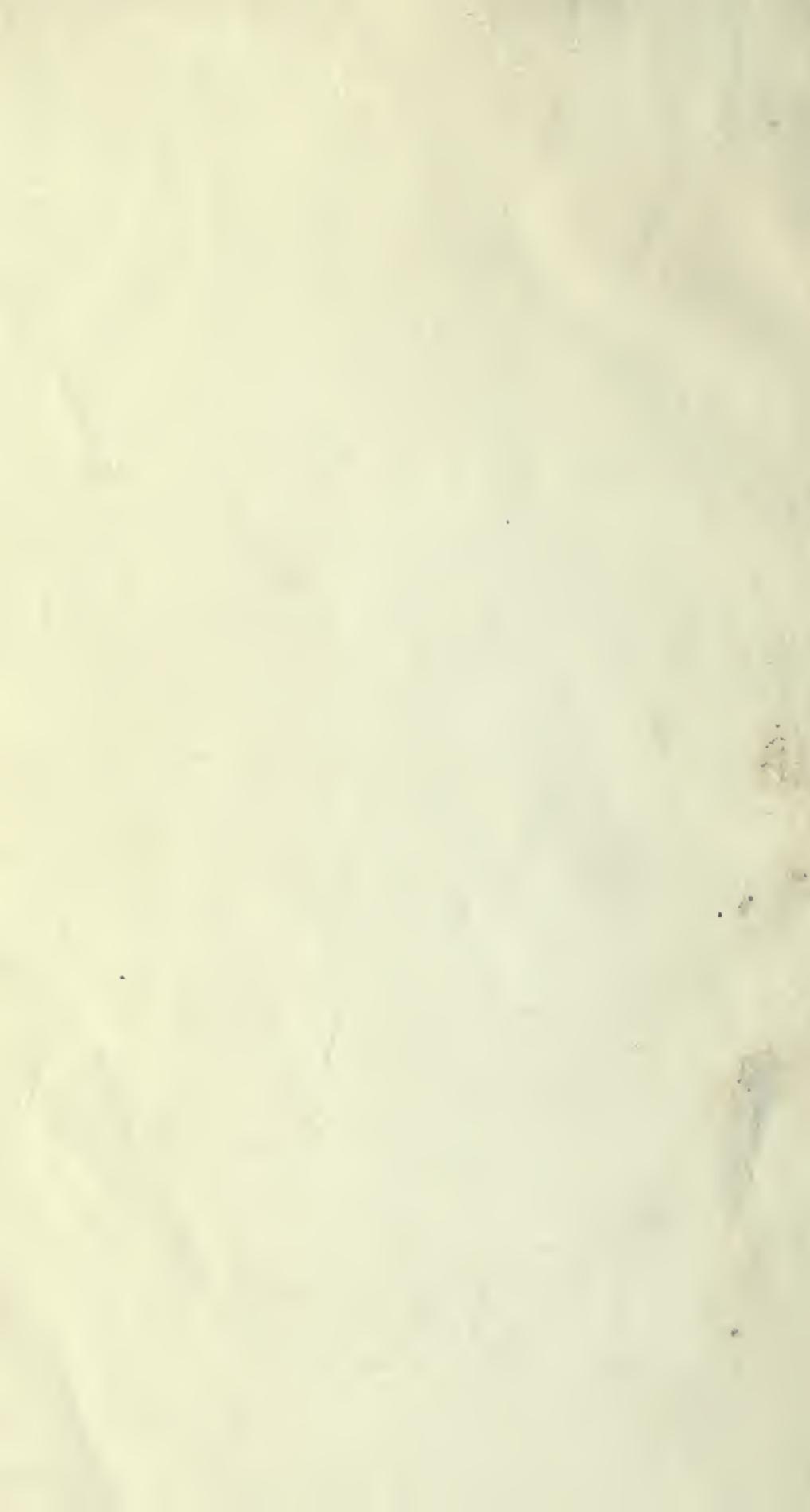
"They shall have mysteries—aye, precious stuff
For knaves to thrive by—mysteries enough;
Dark tangled doctrines, dark as fraud can weave,
Which simple votaries shall on trust receive,
While craftier feign belief, 'till they believe."

Under the auspices of Rigdon, a new sect, the Mormons, was projected, prophecies fell thick and fast from the lips of Joseph ; old Mrs. Smith assumed all the airs of the mother of a Prophet ; that particular family of Smiths were singled out and became exalted above all their legion of namesakes. The bald, clumsy cheat, found here and there an enthusiast, a monomaniac or a knave, in and around its primitive locality, to help it upon its start ; and soon, like another scheme of imposture, (that had a little of dignity and plausibility in it,) it had its Hegira, or flight, to Kirtland ; then to Nauvo ; then to a short resting place in Missouri—and then on over the Rocky Mountains to Utah, or the Salt Lake. Banks, printing offices, temples, cities, and finally a State, have arisen under its auspices. Converts have multiplied to tens of thousands. In several of the countries of Europe there are preachers and organized sects of Mormons ; believers in the divine mission of Joseph Smith & Co.

And here the subject must be dismissed. If it has been treated lightly—with a seeming levity—it is because it will admit of no other treatment. There is no dignity about the whole thing ; nothing to entitle it to mild treatment. It deserves none of the charity extended to ordinary religious fanaticism, for knavery and fraud has been with it incipiently and progressively. It has not even the poor merit of ingenuity. Its success is a slur upon the age. Fanaticism promoted it at first ; then ill advised persecution ; then the designs of demagogues who wished to command the suffrages of its followers ; until finally an American Congress has abetted the fraud and imposition by its acts, and we are to have a state of our proud Union—in this boasted era of light and knowledge—the very name of which will sanction and dignify the fraud and falsehood of Mormon Hill, the gold plates, and the spurious revelation. This much, at least, might have been omitted out of decent respect to the moral and religious sense of the people of the old states.

FARMINGTON.

Township No. 11, R. 3, (now Farmington,) was the first sale of Phelps and Gorham. The purchasers were:—Nathan Comstock, Benjamin Russell, Abraham Lapham, Edmund Jenks, Jeremiah Brown, Ephraim Fish, Nathan Herendeen, Nathan Aldrich, Stephen Smith, Benjamin Rickenson, William Baker and Dr. Daniel Brown. The deed was given to Nathan Comstock, and Benjamin





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